

REMARKS/ARGUMENTS

Claims 1-15 and 25-36 are pending, with claims 1 and 25 being independent. Claims 9-11, 27 and 28 have been withdrawn from consideration. Claims 1 and 25 have been amended. Support for the amendments to claims 1 and 25 can be found on page 8, lines 33-35 of the specification. No new matter has been added.

In the pending Office Action, the Examiner rejected claims 1-4 and 25 under 35 U.S.C. § 102(b) as allegedly anticipated by United States Patent No. 5,184,686 (Gonzalez); claims 5, 31 and 32 under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as obvious over Gonzalez alone; claims 6-8, 12, 13, 26, 29 and 33-36 under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as obvious over Gonzalez in view of United States Patent No. 3,333,432 (Hale, *et al.*); United States Patent No. 3,824,798 (Shiroyama, *et al.*); United States Patent No. 4,812,079; Japanese document No. 53-118,791) or WIPO document (EP 0952301). The Examiner objected to claims 14, 15 and 30 as depending from a rejected base claim, but indicated that each of these claims presents allowable subject matter.

Applicants have carefully considered the Examiner's rejections together with the reasons offered in support thereof, and respectfully submit that the invention as claimed and described is patentably distinct from the references applied by the Examiner, taken alone or in combination.

The following description of the invention is taken from the specification and is offered for the Examiner's convenience. It is not intended to argue limitations not present in the claims or to argue for an interpretation of any claim limitation that is more narrow than would otherwise be understood by one of ordinary skill in the art would understand such limitation to mean in light of a full and complete reading of the specification.

The invention is directed to an off-shore drilling installation, and a method of drilling off-shore using such an installation. The installation includes a guide device disposed on the sea

bottom, at least one drilling riser extending from a floating support on the surface of the water to the guide device and a drill string having a drilling tool fitted on one end thereof for drilling into the sea bottom. The guide device includes a telescopic guide pipe made up of at least two pre-assembled coaxial telescopic guide elements: an outer guide element and an inner guide element. The inner guide element is disposed within the outer guide element and is also extendable from a retracted position within the outer guide element to a deployed position that is beyond the outer guide element. The pre-assembled guide elements are pre-assembled together before their extension from their retracted position to their deployed position, thereby enabling the cementing of the telescopic guide in place only after the telescopic guide pipe has been fully deployed. Using this telescoping arrangement of guide elements allows drilling to proceed more rapidly than possible with prior art arrangements.

The drilling arrangement of Gonzalez is one such prior art arrangement. Gonzalez discloses a method for offshore drilling having a sequential step-by-step drilling process. According to this process, successive lengths of bores are drilled and then reinforced with casings. Gonzalez shows the use of separate casings **22 a,b,c**, that are assembled on-site in sequence at successive depths (*see*, Figs. 5-8). As shown in Fig. 5, a bore is drilled, a casing **22a** is placed into the bore, and then casing **22b** (Fig. 6) is lowered into casing **22a** and then through casing **22a** (Figs. 7-8) to extend therethrough. These casings, which the Examiner has identified as corresponding to the claimed telescopic guide elements, are not in fact telescopic at all, as they are simply slidable with respect to one another. This is highlighted in Fig. 6, which shows the two casings completely separated. To further emphasize the difference between the claimed structure and that of Gonzalez, the claims recite that the inventive guide elements are “pre-assembled *together*”, to underscore the distinction that they are arranged telescopically, with one

pre-assembled inside the other. By the amendment above, the meaning of the limitation “pre-assembled” is refined to distinguish more clearly over the device taught by Gonzalez.

In Gonzalez, casings **22 a,b,c** are independent and separated from one another. This is why Gonzalez teaches that it is necessary to lift up drill bit **38** by lifting drill string **28** before any casing can be lowered (*see*, col. 3, lines 60-67; col. 4, lines 17-18). Gonzalez also teaches that this construction requires a cementing operation around each successive casing (col. 4, lines 9-16). The claims have been amended to require that the cementing only be performed after the full extension of the telescopic guide elements, further underscoring the distinction between the claimed invention and the apparatus and method of Gonzalez.

In the pending Office Action, the Examiner took the position that the term “pre-assembled” means only that the item so described is “assembled before production” (Office Action, p. 5, para. 8). The various casings in Gonzalez are independent, and are therefore not “pre-assembled” (as that term is used in the instant application) so as to be extendable in a pre-assembled state. As made more clear by the instant amendment, the telescopic guide elements must be pre-assembled *together*, thereby highlighting this distinction with Gonzalez, and addressing the issue raised in the Office Action about the meaning to be ascribed to Gonzalez. Gonzalez, as interpreted by the Examiner, does not teach the pre-assembly of the telescopic guide elements *together*, but only shows that they are assembled before their deployment in connection with the drilling for oil contemplated thereby.

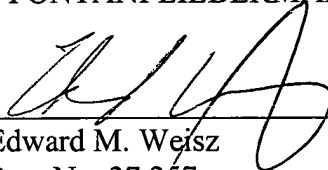
The telescoping arrangement of guide elements that are pre-assembled together according to the invention overcomes the need for the removing of the drill string or cementing the telescoped elements until the completion of the operation. Thus, the inventive arrangement

and method provide for faster, cheaper and more efficient drilling in a complex and rapidly changing environment.

It is believed that no fees or charges are required at this time in connection with the present application. However, if any fees or charges are required at this time, they may be charged to our Patent and Trademark Office Deposit Account No. 03-2412.

Respectfully submitted,
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